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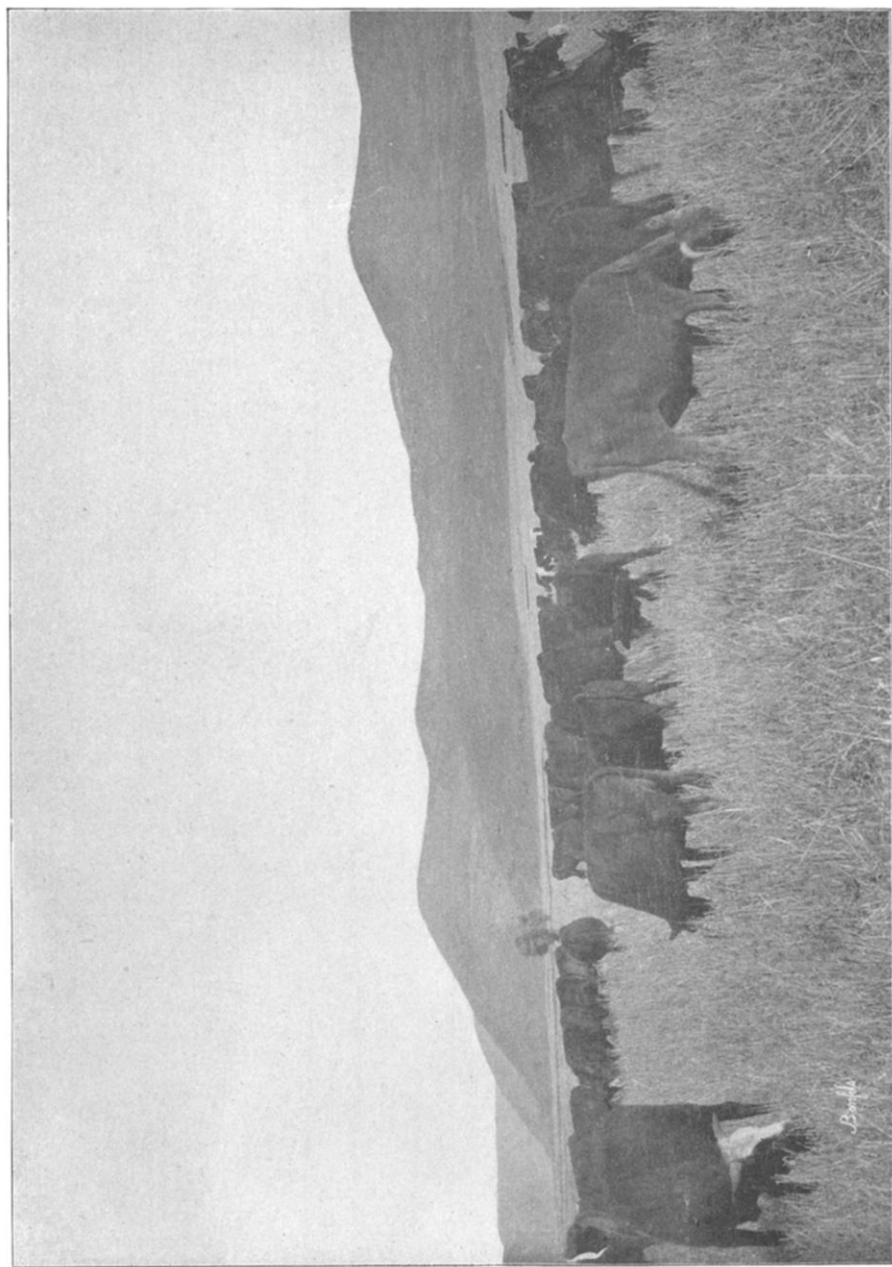
FROM JENIN TO NAZARETH.

I. THE PLAIN OF JEZREEL AND BEISAN.

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THE direct and ordinary route from Jenin to Nazareth leads straight across the plain of Esdraelon and requires about seven hours' easy riding. But apart from its historical associations, and the anticipation of the first glimpse of Nazareth among its hills, the road is but faintly interesting. If one takes the less direct route by Zerín he has the added interest of a nearer view of the mountains of Gilboa and a visit to the miserably filthy village that stands on the isolated elevation on which Naboth tilled his vineyard and Ahab built his palace. Yet even then the day's ride is but a necessary evil by which one passes over from the borders of Old Testament history to those of the New—a sort of geographical apocrypha standing between Malachi and Matthew. At Zerín, however, one may turn sharp to the right and go eastward towards the Jordan and over this unusual and altogether circuitous road arrive at Nazareth after a few days' trip in comparatively unvisited regions where the traces of the Græco-Roman civilization so little observed in Judea and Samaria will serve well as an introduction to Galilean life in the time of Christ.

No one can come down from the heights of Jenin into the plain of Esdraelon without thinking of its immense military possibilities. To the west is Carmel thrusting itself out into the Mediterranean as a breakwater for the one natural harbor between Beirût and Egypt; before one are the passes that lead through the hills of Galilee; behind are those that lead to Samaria; while to the east are the fords of the Jordan that bind the Hauran to the plain and sea. To say nothing of the temptations



THE PLAIN OF JEZREEL AND THE MOUNTAINS OF GILBOA

of the great rich plain itself, it is Palestine's inevitable battle field for north and south, east and west. And warlike indeed are the memories the plain recalls. On the slopes of Zerin the hosts of Israel camped just before the fatal day on Gilboa;



VIEW FROM JENIN ACROSS ESDRAELON TO THE GALILEAN HILLS

across the plain Joram watched the approach of his assassin Jehu. Over to the north where once stood a crusader's castle Bonaparte with a handful of men put to flight twenty-odd thousand Syrians, Pharaoh Necho defeated the unfortunate Josiah, and the "mother in Israel" with the aid of Barak and the ancient torrent Kishon defeated Sisera. Yet nothing can be more peaceful than the Esdraelon of today. From Zerin (and indeed from a little farther east) to the sea the plain is thoroughly cultivated, the rights of pasturage claimed by the Bedouin having been in some way disposed of. The local trail from Zerin to the main path to Beisan often gets lost among newly ploughed

fields, and one finds oneself riding across furrows and standing grain.

Not far from Zerin is Ain Jalud or Fountain of Goliath, a noble pool with springs in a great cave at the foot of the hills



AIN JALUD

and every morning filled with the black cattle of the Arabs. If Colonel Conder be correct, Gideon chose his three hundred heroes from those who lapped water like a dog at this spring, and with them pursued the Midianites down the valley toward Beisan. From this point the plain of Jezreel dips gently east-

ward watered by the brook Jalud which flows from this pool. The path runs parallel with the brook, though distant a few rods on the foot of the mountains of Gilboa. It is much used by native travelers to and from the east of Jordan, and one meets frequent small trains of camels loaded with the highly prized millstones from the Hauran. Singularly enough, a little distance from the pool we met an Arab riding furiously in search of a lost child. But all likeness to the story of Jesus disappeared as we overtook the mother. She rode impassively away on a miserable little donkey, apparently indifferent as to the fate of her child.

Perhaps a third of the way from Zerin to Beisan, and not very far from the ruins of an ancient village, there is a second pool at the foot of a small palm. Like Ain Jalud this pool was filled with black cattle and we were forced to look for shade a little up on the side of the mountain under a great rock. From



THE PALM ON THE PLAIN OF JEZREEL

the elevation thus gained the view was far more beautiful than the descriptions of too many travelers would lead one to expect. There was nowhere any reminder of the stern hillsides of Judea,

beautiful though they had seemed in their bareness. Between us and the plain there trickled a little brook of deliciously clear water in which numerous small fish were swimming. Below us stretched the plain of Jezreel from Zerín to Beisan, with Esdraelon beyond, dotted with the black tents and flocks and herds of the Bedouin, broken into great patches of green and red, gray and yellow, and rolling up gently on its northern side to the foothills of Galilee. From east to west the horizon was bounded by mountains—those of Moab with their incomparable purple haze, Little Hermon with its white *wely*, and far to the north Hermon itself with its snowy summit, a not impossible rival of the Jungfrau herself.

The path along the foot of the mountains of Gilboa, with all its reminders of the fate of the first king of Israel, is from this point always in clear view of the Tell at Beisan, and it is impossible to escape the quite unjustifiable feeling that one is leaving the lands of the Bible and entering those of classical antiquity. One's attention, at any rate, is rapidly diverted from religion to archæology and agriculture. The large plain, though less cultivated than Esdraelon, and far more at the mercy of the Bedouins, is so well watered that it could be made a veritable garden with small effort. As it is the Arabs



A BEDOUIN ENCAMPMENT

attempt a rather unusual amount of irrigation, and we passed several groups of men engaged in repairing the trenches, sometimes with the aid of naked boys working in the water itself, sometimes by the use of a curious spade which one man held and three others on the opposite side of the trench lifted by means of a rope with all the rhythm of dancers. Yet no matter how great the labor bestowed upon them, no provision is

made for crossing these trenches and one rides through them to the great damage of their mud walls.

The present town of Beisan is a miserable collection of mud huts reinforced with sheets of tin cut from the Russian petroleum cans that have lately begun to play a considerable rôle in Arab life. With the possible exception of Zerin (and several others) it is the filthiest, worst smelling town in Palestine, and



THE VALLEY AND TELL OF BEISAN

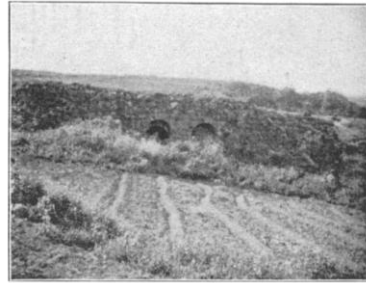
any stray camper will do well to pitch his tent as near as possible to the edge of the crater-like valley in which are the best preserved traces of the ancient Scythopolis and from the center of which rises the truncated cone of the Tell. From this point of view, nearly as well as from the top of the Tell, it is easy to see

how the city became the head of the Decapolis. At least four brooks flow by the site of the city. The brook Jalud cuts its way to the north of the Tell, and thence flows straight on to enter the Jordan near the ford that led to Pella. Of the three other brooks, one flows into the Jalud and the other two in a southwest direction into the Jordan. Thus the portion of the city near the fortress stood at the end of the valley of Jezreel and at the head of a miniature delta spreading out through various valleys to the Jordan three hundred feet below. So great was its water supply that the surrounding country might be turned into a marsh in time of war. But this was not all. These converging approaches led from numerous fords of the Jordan to the natural highway to the sea—the plains of Jezreel and Esdraelon. Both to the north and the south the land rises in great hills that plunge precipitously into the Jordan valley, and afford but indirect and dangerous routes to the west. From the top of the Tell at Beisan one can look not merely back over the plain as far as Zerin, but up and down the Jordan valley and the opposite hill country of the Decapolis from Gadara to far south of Pella, and all this territory had no westward outlet except the

plain of Jezreel. The city, in a word, commanded the converging points of the roads leading from the Hauran to the Mediterranean.

That the ancient town had an importance equal to its opportunities appears immediately from its ruins. To judge from these, the city stretched quite beyond the limits set by the few traces of walls for at least two miles along the edge of the Jordan valley and must have been at least a mile broad. It is true that anyone fresh from the monumental piles of brick and concrete in Rome will feel at first disappointment in the heaps of basalt and the occasional limestone columns that stand out here from the gardens and fields. But more detailed examination shows not only traces of considerable architectural and artistic taste, but also introduces one far more completely than can even the long line of pillars at Sebustieh to the chief characteristics of Græco-Roman towns—the colonnaded street, the theater and other places of public amusement, the temple, and the fortress.

The first of the ruins which one is likely to visit are those of the theater. These stand just over the edge of the great basin made by the Jalud. It was not a very large building, a little more than a semicircle, perhaps 180 feet across, with twelve tiers of seats. In many particulars it is badly preserved, the seats being quite broken, the stage long since destroyed and turned into a garden, and the *vomitoria* used for stables, while even the ends of the great semicircle are in sad dilapidation. Yet as one stands on one of these ends he can still see the sweep of the walls with the traces of the seats, the openings of the entrances, and the receivers for brass sounding boards. Looked at from the rear the ruins are much more complete. The basalt walls are tolerably well preserved, and the masonry of the inclined arched passageways is as solid as on the day it was made.



RUINS OF THE THEATRE

It is a most singular feeling that comes over one as, after climbing up over fallen blocks of basalt, he pushes away the tall grass and bushes and looks down into one of these corridors, now used by the Arabs as shelters for goats and cattle. But the sense of the futility of human effort, not unmingled with the chronic indignation at the Turkish misrule that traveling in the altered country always begets, grows deeper as one crosses the brook on pieces of broken columns, makes his way over the hill that projects into the upper part of the basin, sees here and there pieces of carved basalt worked into the walls of hovels, and bits of marble decorating the tombs of village worthies, and after clambering over some acres of basalt stones that mark the sites of the old houses, finally looks down upon the wall, almost covered with vegetation, that is the only reminder of the hippodrome. The marble seats that once lined the great building have almost entirely disappeared, the goal (if indeed it be the goal) is broken to its base, the very ground itself seems sinking into the vaults beneath.

On the hill to the northwest of the theater there are a few columns of marble that were probably a part of a temple, for near by is the marble base and the basalt slab with the carefully cut groove for catching the blood, that formed the top of the altar. It was impossible for two men to turn over the base, but on the three sides exposed to view no inscription was to be seen.



TOP OF ALTAR

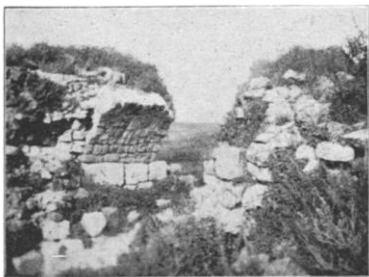
In the valley at the foot of the Tell there are a number of stumps of limestone columns, perhaps a yard in diameter, which evidently mark the line of a colonnade that ran easterly from the vicinity of the theater, with a branch running at right angles and bisecting the valley between the Tell and the western edge of the valley. At a point near the junction of these two streets of columns there is standing a pillar with a simply carved bracket on its southern side, as if intended to carry some arch or beam.

On the Tell itself there are a few reminders of the old fortress that once covered it. On the north side are a piece of the old wall and the ruins of the gate, one side of which shows strikingly in the spring of the ruined arch the difference between the masonry of the Romans, with its large, well-jointed stones, and that of the Arabs, with its ill-matched, rough pieces of rock. Farther up are the remains of vaulted chambers and a few of the tiers of the wall. At places the ground sounds hollow, as if there were other vaulted chambers yet unopened, but the Arabs



THE RUINS OF THE COLONNADE

will doubtless soon ruin all this masonry in their search for treasures and antiquities. From the Tell one gets a charming view of the little valley, with its columns and bridges (one at least being of Roman origin), and also of the surrounding country. But nowhere is the desolation of a natural paradise more evident. The few palms and the little fields tilled by the Arabs make only more evident the waste of possibilities in this naturally luxuriant region. What other city in the world has at its back potential miles of grain and at its feet a well-watered valley, with an almost tropical climate?

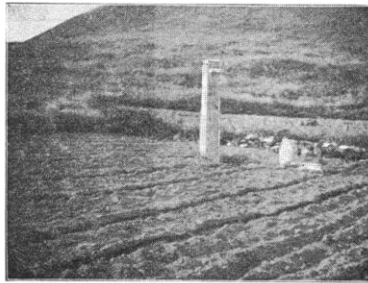


RUINS OF GATE

Roman cities in Palestine. All that is wanted would be to put the Jalud to some simple hydraulic uses and sweep the débris into the great valley below. If such excavations might possibly fail in furnishing illustrations of biblical history, it would

And from the Tell one can also see how real are the extraordinary possibilities for excavation pointed out by Professor Smith. It is impossible to doubt that in the little valley about the Tell are the remains of one of the richest of the Græco-

certainly furnish much material throwing light upon Græco-Roman life in the immediate vicinity of the region in which the most of Christ's life was passed. But until either agriculture or excavation touches this isolated spot it is likely to remain as it is today, the abode of dirt and jackals and the victim of Turkish administration.



COLUMN WITH BRACKET